

WampumFringe

Wampum on the Fringe: Absence of a post-1610 Commodity in Delaware, And why.

Marshall Joseph Becker
Research Fellow in Anthropology
The University of Pennsylvania

mbecker@wcupa.edu
7 February 2009

Paper prepared for the

Archaeological Symposium on the Early Colonial Period of the Delaware Valley.
9 May 2009, New Castle, Delaware (organized by Craig Lukezic)

ABSTRACT

Production of wampum, the marine shell beads of a relatively standardized size and shape, began in the 1590s. By 1610 this native-made commodity had become a significant part of the Dutch mercantile network in the Northeast. The principle production area was around the Long Island Sound. The economics of the pelt trade, however, created the greatest demand for wampum in the region of the three great confederacies: Susquehannock, Five Nations Iroquois, and Huron. This region became the Core Area of diplomatic wampum use. Peoples adjacent to the Core formed a Periphery in which wampum was used rarely, and only in dealing with peoples in the Core. The Lenape and Lenopi were among the cultures of the Periphery, where the principle use for wampum was in ornament. South of Bombay Hook in Delaware the use of wampum has yet to be found in the documents or the archaeological record. Reasons for this cultural boundary will be discussed.